



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



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# *The Centennial Trail:* **A Walk Through the History of the National Wildlife Refuge System** *Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge*

It all began with one man and one boat, protecting pelicans on a small five and a half-acre island in Florida. On March 14, 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established our nation's first national wildlife refuge at Pelican Island and sparked a conservation movement. From that humble beginning arose the world's largest and most diverse network of lands dedicated to the protection and management of wildlife. Today, America's National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses over 94 million acres on over 530 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas.

Despite its historical significance and uniqueness as the first national wildlife refuge, the refuge has never been able to provide the public an opportunity to see Pelican Island. To give the public the chance to see where it all began, The Centennial Trail will be constructed at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, marking the Centennial Anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System in 2003. The trail consists of a boardwalk leading to an observation tower.

### **Centennial Trail Boardwalk**

- Meanders for 1/4 mile through restored tidal mangrove swamp and hydric hammock habitats.
- Incorporates over 530 engraved planks — one for each refuge in the system — spaced throughout the length of the boardwalk.

Each engraved plank will include the refuge name, its state and establishment year.

Refuge planks will be placed in successive order of establishment, beginning with most current and counting backwards toward the first refuge — Pelican Island — at the observation tower.

- Begins with an interpretive panel on the refuge system, and contains another interpretive panel for each decade of the system.
- Interpretive themes will focus on the significant accomplishments of the system and important conservationists.
- Includes a boardwalk extension to a covered overlook for additional wildlife observation and photography opportunities.
- Incorporates gently inclining slopes and eight foot wide paths allowing universal accessibility.

### **Eighteen Foot Wildlife Observation Tower**

- Provides the only land-based opportunity to view Pelican Island.
- Located amongst the mangrove and cabbage palm fringe of the Indian River Lagoon.
- Includes two mounted spotting scopes for viewing the Pelican Island rookery and over 30 species of birds.

These facilities are only part of a larger concept for refuge public use facilities. Additional trails and an off-site visitor's center are planned. Because the refuge is located just 15 miles east of the heavily traveled I-95 corridor and near a number of attractions with high visitation (e.g., Sebastian Inlet State Recreation Area, Disney's Vero Beach Resort), annual visitation to Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge could reach many thousands once the public use facilities are complete.

The Centennial Trail will be the focal point of the **National Centennial Celebration of the National Wildlife Refuge System on March 14, 2003**. On that day, the Centennial Trail Grand Opening and Dedication Ceremony will be held. National dignitaries and the media will be invited to join the Fish and Wildlife Service on that day to celebrate a century of conservation.

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